

CLAIMS

1. An information retrieval apparatus for searching a set of information
5 items, the apparatus comprising

a mapping processor operable to generate data representative of a map of information items from a set of information items, the map providing the information items with respect to positions in an array in accordance with a mutual similarity of the information items, similar information items mapping to similar positions in the array,

10 a graphical user interface for displaying a representation of at least some of the information items, and

15 a user control for selecting an information item, wherein a search processor is operable to perform a related search with respect to the user selected information item by identifying information items which correspond to positions in the array which are neighbouring positions with respect to the array position corresponding to the user selected information item.

2. An information retrieval apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the search processor is operable to search the set of information items in accordance with a
20 search query and to identify information items corresponding to the search query, and the mapping processor is operable to generate the map data of information items identified by the search processor as a result of the search on the search query.

3. An information retrieval apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the
25 graphical user interface is operable to display a representation of at least some of the positions of the array corresponding to identified information items as an n-dimensional display array of display points within a display area.

4. An information retrieval apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the
30 number of dimensions n is two, a position in the array being defined by x, y co-ordinates.

5. An information retrieval apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, wherein the search processor is operable to perform a related search with respect to the user selected information item by identifying information items which correspond to positions in the array which are within a radius of positions from the array position corresponding to the 5 user selected information item.

6. An information retrieval apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the user control is operable to provide the user with a facility for specifying the number of neighbouring positions in accordance with a relative similarity of the information items to 10 be searched by the search processor in the related search, with respect to the array position of interest.

7. A method for searching a set of information items, the method comprising generating data representative of a map of information items from a set of 15 information items, the map providing the information items with respect to positions in an array in accordance with a mutual similarity of the information items, similar information items mapping to similar positions in the array, displaying a representation of at least some of the information items, selecting an information item, and 20 performing a related search with respect to the user selected information item by identifying information items which correspond to positions in the array which are neighbouring positions with respect to the array position corresponding to the user selected information item.

25 8. A method as claimed in Claim 7, comprising searching the information items in accordance with a search query, identifying information items corresponding to the search query, and the generating the map data comprises generating the map data of information items identified by the search processor as 30 a result of the search on the search query.

9. A method as claimed in Claim 8, comprising

displaying a representation of at least some of the positions of the array correspond to identified information items as an n-dimensional display array of display points within a display area.

5 10. A method as claimed in Claim 9, wherein the number of dimensions n is two, a position in the array being defined by x, y co-ordinates.

10 11. A method as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the performing the related search comprises performing a related search with respect to the user selected information item by identifying information items which correspond to positions in the array which are within a radius of positions from the array position corresponding to the user selected information item.

15 12. A method as claimed in Claim 12, wherein the user control is operable to provide the user with a facility for specifying the radius of positions in accordance with a relative similarity of the information item to be searched by the search processor in the related search, with respect to the array position of interest.

20 13. Computer software having program code for carrying out a method according to claim 7.

14. A medium for providing program code according to claim 13.

15. A medium according to claim 14, the medium being a storage medium.

25 16. A medium according to claim 14, the medium being a transmission medium.